## IMPORTANT LOAN OF CRETAN ANTIQUITIES

AN important collection of sealstones and other antiquities from Crete has been lent anonymously to the Museum and is exhibited in the First Classical Room.[1] Considering the difficulty of obtaining original antiquities to illustrate the art and life of ancient Crete this material is of first-rate importance. The collection of sealstones especially is almost unique of its kind, having been formed during a period of many years with exceptional opportunities; and the other pieces, consisting chiefly of bronze tools, stone vases, and gold ornaments, will do much to supplement and help the understanding of our Cretan reproductions.

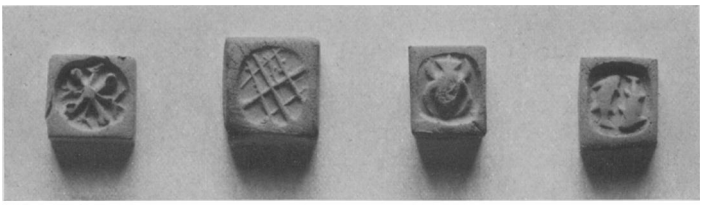

FIG. 1. PRIMITIVE CRETAN PICTOGRAPHS

Of the many sensational discoveries of Sir Arthur Evans in Crete there is perhaps none that has appealed so much to the popular imagination as the finding of a written language. The problem which had puzzled everyone—how the highly cultured Mycenaeans could have dispensed with writing when the peoples of Egypt and Asia Minor had long ago evolved a script—was solved at last; and at the same time the first European language was found. More than a thousand years before the Greeks in classical times had borrowed their alphabet from the Phoenicians, their predecessors of Greek lands had produced an independent native script. That Schliemann had found no trace of this language at Mycenae was apparently mere chance, due to the fact that it had been written on perishable material; and that Sir Arthur Evans found such abundant remains of it in Crete was again largely fortuitous, due to the circumstance that the early Cretans wrote on sealstones, terracotta tablets, and other such durable objects. The most complete record of this written language is on the sealstones. Here we can trace its development from Early Minoan to Late Minoan times; that is, through the third and the second millennia B. C. As all the stages are illustrated on the stones included in our new loan, we could not have a better opportunity of studying the gradual unfolding of a primitive language—though its actual decipherment is as yet impossible.

FIG. 2. PRIMITIVE CRETAN HIEROGLYPHS

The stones of the Early Minoan period (about 2800–2200 B. C.), of which there are forty-three in the collection, show a great variety of shapes—including cylindrical,

[1] In Cases B, D, D2.

pyramidal, conoid, quadrilateral, and three-sided rounded beads—and are engraved with rude pictographs, consisting of primitive renderings of human beings, animals, ships, floral patterns, branches, spirals, meanders, and zigzag and crossed lines (cf. fig. 1). It is clearly an experimental stage without traditional forms. The stone is invariably of a soft variety, that is, steatite of different colors.

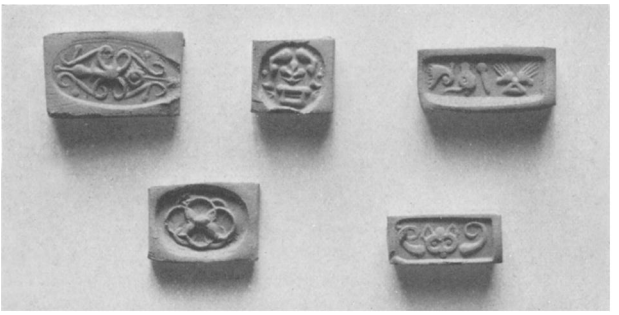

FIG. 3. DEVELOPED CRETAN HIEROGLYPHS

of stones in our collection, comprising sixty-six examples and dating from the end of the Early Minoan to the beginning of the Middle Minoan period (about 2200 B. C.), illustrate this interesting stage (cf. fig. 2). It is noticeable that in the earlier examples we often find side by side with the hieroglyphic forms the primitive pictographs, which naturally persisted for some time. We note, for instance, on one face of a bead a single human figure, while on the others is a collection of symbols, clearly "formulae"

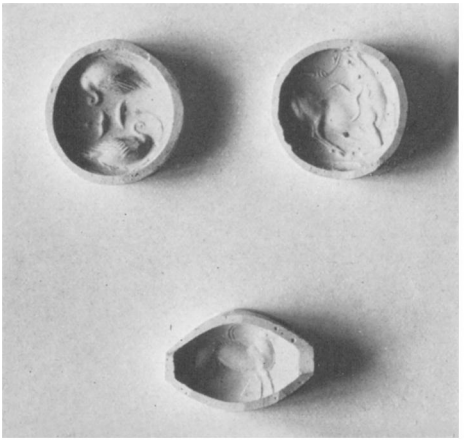

FIG. 4. NATURALISTIC CRETAN DESIGNS

As time went on, the three-sided elongated bead became the most popular, we might almost say the standardized shape, while the pictographs were transformed into less rude, more conventionalized forms. Several symbols now generally occur together, showing that from mere ideographic

for the formation of words. The words themselves we cannot read, but how eloquent they are, nevertheless, of the evolution of human language!

By the Middle Minoan III period (about 1800–1600 B. C.), further great strides have been taken. The stones are now no longer steatite but of hard varieties, such as carnelian, chalcedony, green jasper; and the symbols appear in a highly systematized form, executed often with great nicety. The hieroglyphic script has reached its full development. Twenty beautiful examples of this class, chiefly three-sided elongated and four-sided equilateral beads, are included in our collection (cf. fig. 3). The symbols used are conventionalized flowers, heads of animals, implements, the human eye, two crossed arms, all familiar signs of Minoan vocabulary, a few, but only a few, of which bear a distinct resemblance to Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The next development in Minoan writing was equally important, and incidentally affected the whole subsequent glyptic art of Crete. The linear script, of which there is some evidence even in the Early Minoan period (cf. e.g. No. L2109.1A in our collection), was developed side by side with the more popular pictographic script until it finally gained almost complete ascendancy. For it is natural that constant repetition of pictographic symbols would in time tend to simplify these into linear equivalents. On the clay tablets of Hagia Triada and of Knossos—that is, in the Late Minoan I and II periods (about 1600–1350 B. C.)—the linear script is accordingly the universal form. And concurrently it disappears from the sealstones; for having no longer an aesthetic value, it no longer appealed to the stone engravers—fortunately for us, because it made way for the naturalistic designs of purely ornamental character, which rank among the finest products of Cretan art. The Museum already owns ten stones of this class; we can now add one hundred and fifty-eight examples, of which several are of extraordinary beauty. We may mention particularly a carnelian with a standing ibex (No. L 2109.3 F), a green jasper with two birds (No. L 2109.3K), and a haematite stone with a wounded bull (No. L 2109.3 M), which for delicacy of execution and beauty of composition can hold their own with the best classical Greek products (fig. 4). We realize that the fine understanding of animal life which we so much admire in the representations of fifth-century gem engravers was a quality inherited from a much earlier age.

Naturally the transition from hieroglyphic to purely decorative representations was gradual and on some of the earlier examples we can in fact clearly note the development of the earlier pictographs into purely ornamental forms; and even on the later stones such representations as the four-petaled flower and the star are continued, though, whatever their original meaning was, it had by then been probably forgotten. The most prevalent forms for the stones are the lentoid and glandular, clearly derived from the former rounded and elongated beads, but now regularly with two instead of three faces. The variety of stones used—mostly hard quartzes, such as carnelian, agate, jasper, chalcedony, and rock crystal—adds very greatly to their general attractiveness. In addition to these stones there is a red jasper ring, important for its rarity and for the interest of the subject engraved on the bezel, evidently a cult scene with three women approaching a female seated deity.

Among the other pieces of the collection we may note as of special interest a group of thirteen objects found in the Dictaean Cave, the reputed birthplace of Zeus. They are votive offerings of pious Cretans brought to this sacred grove during the Late Minoan period—double axes, knives, tweezers, hair-fasteners, a needle, a chisel, a weaving hook, an earring. Hundreds of such objects were found in the stalagmites and stalactites of the cave, showing that it was once an active center of religious worship—not apparently of the great female nature divinity, but of her son and ultimate successor, the head of the later Greek religion.

Welcome additions are also several specimens of bronze tools and weapons, in excellent preservation. Two long chisels, two double axes, and a spearhead all belong to the Late Minoan period, but the most im-

portant piece is a dagger blade, probably of Middle Minoan II date (about 2000–1800 B. C.), found in the Lasithi plain.[1] It is engraved with two spirited scenes: a fight between two bulls, and a man spearing a boar. The drawing is faulty and the work not very careful, but the movement and life in the picture are characteristically Minoan. As the earliest known predecessor of the ornamented dagger blades from Mycenae it is, moreover, of extraordinary interest.

Among the most attractive objects that have been found in Crete are the variegated stone vases found in Mochlos and elsewhere. The often brilliant coloring and beautiful shapes of these hand-carved vases certainly make a strong appeal to modern taste. Two original examples of the Early Minoan III and Middle Minoan I periods (about 2500–2000 B. C.) are included in the new loan. They will be invaluable for our proper appreciation of the reproductions we have of such vases (Case Q), since colored plaster casts can never fully convey the beauty of stone work. Placed with some other original examples of Late Minoan date, acquired at different times from various sources, they make a very pleasing group.

The rest of the material consists of several pieces of gold jewelry—again important for comparison with our reproductions—three beautiful Late Neolithic or Early Minoan stone celts, a stone mould for making gold ornaments with animal representations, another for casting small votive axes, and several rude bronze statuettes; also a diminutive terracotta lamp from Gournia of an engaging form, and a few small terracotta and glass shells, very naturalistic in appearance. G. M. A. R.

[1] Published by A. J. Evans, The Palace of Minos, p. 718, fig. 541.

# ACCESSIONS AND NOTES

MEMBERSHIP. At the meeting of the Trustees on March 27, 1922, Dr. Margaret B. Wilson was elected a Sustaining Member, and two hundred and two persons became Annual Members.

JAPANESE PRINTS. In Room H 11 the exhibition of Chinese portraits has made room for Japanese prints taken from the Museum collection. This time they are not chosen to represent one artist or one period but form a selection of the best pieces in the collection and of the subjects most attractive from an artistic point of view.

BEQUEST OF WILLIAM MITCHELL. From the bequest of William Mitchell the Museum receives for its Department of Decorative Arts an English long-case clock, dating from the first years of the eighteenth century, and two pieces of French silver of the late eighteenth century. The clock is an interesting example of case design, and, except for the loss of the corner pilasters of the hood, is in its original condition. The carcass is of oak with walnut veneer decorated with checkered banding and panels of floral arabesque. Its workmanship seems English rather than Dutch, being somewhat crude and lacking the use of brightly stained woods. The movement is by Joseph Windmills, whose name appears on the lower part of the clock face. Windmills was admitted as master in the Clockmakers' Guild in 1702, this work dating probably from the following decade. Clocks of this date are not very rare, but it is hard to find one that has escaped to such an extent the hand of the jobbing repairer.

The silver consists of a ewer and basin bearing the mark of B. Samson, a smith working in Toulouse. Although the design is in the style of Louis XV, it was probably made years after the rocaille manner had ceased to be fashionable in Paris. It shows the conception of a provincial workman rather than the refined taste of the metropolis and derives its charm to a great extent from this and a certain robustness which recalls the homely surroundings of a well-to-do provincial.

From his collection of bronzes Mr. Mitchell bequeathed to the Museum a